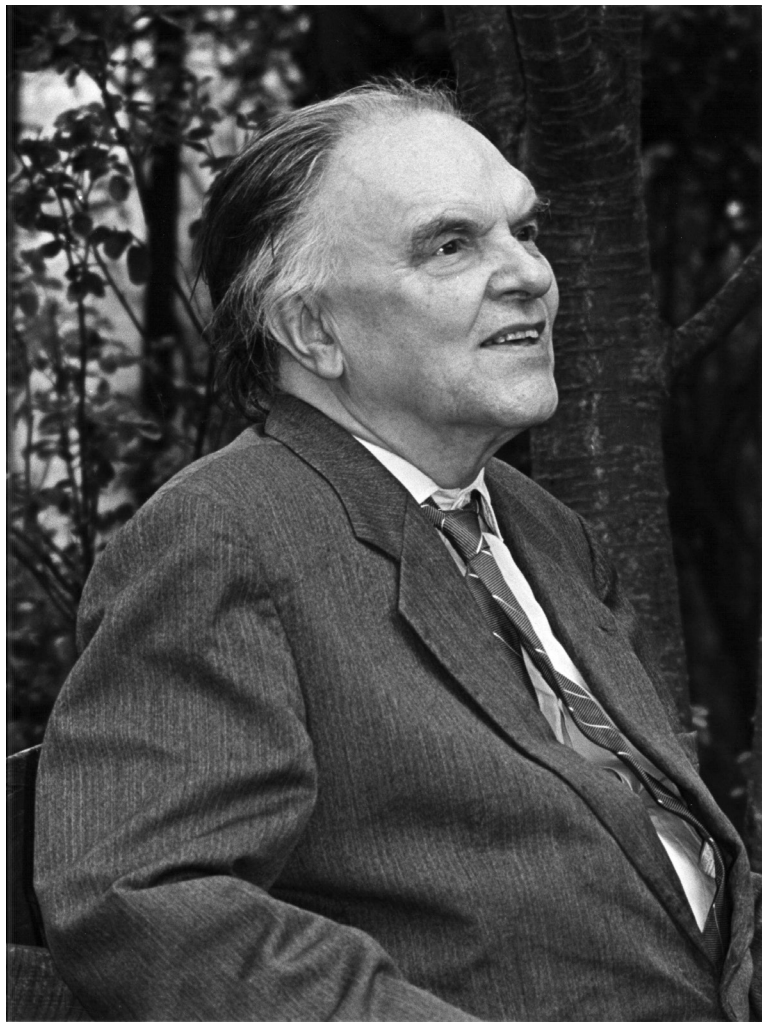

PETER GEACH

Peter Thomas Geach
1916–2013

Peter Geach was born on 29 March 1916 at 41, Royal Avenue, Chelsea. He was the son of George Hender Geach, a Cambridge graduate working in the Indian Educational Service (IES), who later taught philosophy at Lahore. George Geach was married to Eleonore Sgnonina, the daughter of a Polish civil engineer who had emigrated to England. The marriage was not a happy one: after a brief period in India Eleonore returned to England to give birth and never returned to her husband. Peter Geach's first few years were spent in the house of his Polish grandparents in Cardiff, but at the age of four his father had him made the ward of a former nanny of his own, an elderly nonconformist lady named Miss Tarr. When Peter's mother tried to visit him, Miss Tarr warned him that a dangerous mad woman was coming, so that he cowered away from her when she tried to embrace him. As she departed she threw a brick through a window, and from that point there was no further contact between mother and son. When he was eight years old he became a boarder at Llandaff Cathedral School. Soon afterwards his father was invalided out of the IES and took charge of his education. To the surprise of his Llandaff housemaster, Peter won a scholarship to Clifton College, Bristol.

Geach *père* had learnt moral sciences at Trinity College Cambridge from Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, and he inducted his son into the delights of philosophy from an early age. By the time he was thirteen, Peter had read McTaggart's *Some Dogmas of Religion*, which liberated him from Miss Tarr's Puritanism, and Neville Keynes's *Formal Logic*, which gave him a lifelong skill in syllogistic manipulation. Then came the day when, as Peter later recalled, his father thought he had learned as

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much from Keynes as was advisable. 'He said to me, "Now, Peter, tomorrow we begin *Principia Mathematica*": and so we did.' He was also encouraged to read Berkeley's *Dialogues* and Mill's *Utilitarianism*—but only in order to detect the logical fallacies they contained.

In 1934 Peter Geach entered Balliol College, Oxford, and for the first time found himself in congenial company of his own age. His father would have preferred him to go to Cambridge, which he rightly saw as philosophically far superior to Oxford; but the financial advantages of the scholarship Balliol offered tipped the balance. After a year or so, the father, increasingly spendthrift and impoverished, refused to pay any more fees. According to family tradition, the College funded the rest of his Oxford course, only requiring (on the advice of a psychiatrist) that he never see his father again.

None the less the young Geach took notice of his father's warning that 'what they call logic at Oxford, Peter, is just a bad joke' and was careful to avoid contamination by it. Later in life he recalled 'I owe far more to Balliol for the freedom of endless discussion with my peers than for any formal philosophical teaching. In retrospect I seem to have spent four years almost entirely in Balliol; I never went to philosophy lectures outside the College and knew hardly anybody in other Colleges.'

His Balliol tutors were Cyril Bailey, Charles Morris, and Donald Allan. To read Lucretius with Cyril Bailey was a privilege, but other classical authors were less absorbing and Geach obtained only a second in Mods. Charles Morris, he once told me, was a good friend to him when he was very poor. 'He was no logician and knew he was no logician; he did not try to inflict on me detailed studies of [Oxford] rubbish.' To Donald Allan he acknowledged a life-long debt, for a healthy immersion in Plato and Aristotle. Before going to Balliol, under his father's influence Peter had been a great admirer of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica.* 'The spell was unbroken until I was obliged to read the *Nicomachean Ethics* for Lit. Hum. at Oxford; then it was broken completely and for ever.'

Among Geach's undergraduate contemporaries were Jo Grimond and Stuart Hampshire, George Malcolm and John Templeton. During his years in college Edward Heath and Denis Healey arrived. In his last years Peter was one of the very few survivors of a distinguished generation. It was in his final year at Balliol, just before gaining a First in Greats, that Peter became a Roman Catholic. In his later memoirs, he attributes this above all to discussion with his Balliol contemporaries:

> Increasingly, as time went on I found myself arguing with Catholics. I was certainly cleverer than they, but they had the immeasurable advantage that they were right—an advantage that they did not throw away by resorting to the bad philosophy and apologetics then sometimes taught in Catholic schools. One day my defences quite suddenly collapsed: I knew that if I were to remain an honest man I must seek instruction in the Catholic Religion.

Before becoming a Catholic, Geach had already been a Jacobite. With other Balliol men he edited a samizdat publication entitled *The White Rose: for English Liberty.* On 11 December 1936, the day of the abdication of King Edward VIII, he raised a Jacobite flag above the Balliol tower and proclaimed, from the Martyrs' Memorial, the accession to the throne of the Stuart pretender, Rupprecht of Bavaria.

Geach detested the political philosophy that he was taught at Balliol, which praised Locke and Rousseau and condemned Hobbes. In reaction, he condemned Locke as a time server and Rousseau as mad, bad, and dangerous to know. Throughout his life, he held the British empiricists in contempt: Hume was the only one, he thought, deserving of any respect at all. But in his condemnation he did not include Hobbes. While at Balliol, he tells us 'I became convinced that Hobbes was a great and good man, who loved justice and mercy and the rule of law, and hated pride, arrogance, cruelty and other such vices of public life.'

Hobbes is often regarded as the father of British empiricism, but Geach placed him elsewhere in the history of thought. He once wrote to me:

> Hobbes belonged to a splendid tradition of Tory politics: I count in a sort of English apostolic succession the following persons (all male): Saint Thomas More, Hobbes, Dr Johnson, William Cobbett, G. K. Chesterton. What a galaxy of fine old eccentrics, who wrote so well!

I think he would not have objected to being regarded as a successor to that tradition.

It was on Corpus Christi day in 1938, just after his success in Greats, that Peter met his future wife, Elizabeth Anscombe. Elizabeth once narrated to me the initiation of their courtship: 'After the procession, Peter came up to me and began to massage my shoulder. "Miss Anscombe" he said, "I like your mind".' It was to be three years before they married, but from that moment they forged a fruitful philosophical partnership of a kind very rare in the history of philosophy. Peter, in a memoir, offers a moving description of their early years in each other's company:

> Elizabeth had a lot of philosophical teaching from me. I could see that she was good at the subject, but her real development was to come only under the powerful stimulus of Wittgenstein's lectures and her personal conversations with him. Naturally she then moved away from my tutelage; I am afraid that I resented that, but I could recognize this feeling as base and irrational, and soon overcame it.

In the last year of peace Geach held a Gladstone Research Fellowship at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. His official research topic was the philosophy of McTaggart, but much of his time was spent reading the works of Thomas Aquinas. Perhaps it was at this time that he acquired the duodecimo edition of the *Summa Theologiae* which he would draw out of his pocket in seminars and discussions to confute unwary pronouncements by modernising priests.

When war broke out in 1939 Elizabeth Anscombe contributed an essay to a pamphlet called *The Justice of the Present War Examined: a Catholic View*. Drawing on the then neglected just war tradition, her essay—quickly disowned by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham—argued that, while the invasion of Poland gave the Allies a legitimate *ius ad bellum*, the British government was unlikely to observe *ius in bello*, and the probable evil effects of the war were likely to outweigh its good ones. Peter, no doubt for similar reasons, refused to join the British Army, and as a conscientious objector he was employed in the war years in timber production. He did attempt to join the Polish Army, but, despite the assistance of two Poles in the service of the government in exile, his efforts were in vain. But he made many Polish friends and became proficient in the language.

At the end of 1941 Peter and Elizabeth were married in Brompton Oratory, and in the following year Elizabeth obtained a research fellowship at Newnham College, Cambridge. After the war's end the couple lived for six years in rented accommodation in Cambridge, with Elizabeth commuting to Oxford where she had become a Fellow of Somerville in 1946. In this period, during which the couple's first three children were born, Elizabeth was the principal breadwinner and Peter the househusband, eking out the family income with only a little paid teaching and lecturing. The Geaches lived in considerable poverty, taking in lodgers and selling cherished books. Matters improved in 1951 when Peter was appointed to an assistant lecturership in the philosophy department of the University of Birmingham.

During these Cambridge years Geach attended the lectures of Wittgenstein and was frequently invited to take philosophical walks with

him. He took notes of the lectures, which were eventually published. He was, however, never as close to Wittgenstein as was Anscombe, who later became a literary executor of his estate. Both members of the couple were greatly influenced by him, but in different ways. On Elizabeth the influence was all-encompassing: she once said to me—inaccurately but revealingly—'I do not have a thought in my head that does not come from Wittgenstein.' In Peter's case, by contrast, Wittgenstein simply took a place among long installed philosophical heroes such as Aristotle and Aquinas, and side by side with his newly discovered mentor Frege. Geach was, I believe, actually more influenced by Frege than by Wittgenstein, and he always strove to minimise the philosophical differences between the two thinkers.

From both Frege and Wittgenstein Geach learned a supremely important lesson, which he expressed in the following terms:

> Philosophical mistakes are often not refutable falsehoods, but confusions; similarly the contrary insights cannot be conveyed in proper propositions with a truth-value . . . Such insights cannot be demonstrated as theses, but only conveyed dialectically; the dialectic process largely consists in the art, whose practice I have perhaps learned in some measure from Wittgenstein, of reducing to patent nonsense the buried nonsense that is found in attempts to reject these insights.

In 1949 another mentor was added to Geach's philosophical pantheon. Out of the blue he wrote to W. V. O. Quine, whose logical writings he admired, and thus began a lifelong correspondence of mutual respect. When Quine spent a year in Oxford the two attended together seminars held in Magdalen by John Austin (whom Geach regarded as an utter charlatan). Late in life Geach would rank Quine with Wittgenstein as the two philosophical friends from whom he had learnt most. The file of their correspondence remains, as Quine once described it, as 'a happy prospect for posterity'. Geach made no significant contribution to mathematical logic, and he was not the kind of logician who constructs systems with appropriate proofs of consistency and completeness. But as a philosopher of logic he was a worthy interlocutor for Quine.

Obviously, Geach and Anscombe had a great influence on each other; but as philosophers they operated quite differently. Anscombe was the better tutor, Geach the better lecturer and much the better writer. Their daughter Mary says of her mother 'I asked her when I was a girl whether she or my father was the better philosopher, and she said that he had the more powerful intellect, but that she had the greater ability to see about and around a problem' (in M. Geach and L. Gormally (eds.), *Human Life,*

Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe, Exeter, 2005, p. xx). Peter wrote that while Elizabeth was the more adventurous thinker, he himself thought not in bold leaps but by slow steps. He could take offence when people asked him what his wife thought on a philosophical topic, and assumed that he knew, and agreed with, whatever it might be. 'As her husband', he used to say 'I have privileged access to her body, but not to her mind.'

During his Cambridge years Geach gave lectures on Frege and wrote a number of essays on logical topics. His first publication was 'Designation and truth' in *Analysis* in 1948. More significant was 'Subject and predicate' (*Mind*, 1950) which set out a terminology, and a set of logical principles, which in later years he was to put to good use in many areas of philosophy.

Subject, predicate, and proposition were, for Geach, always bits of language: in a proposition, a predicate is attached to a subject and is predicated of what the subject stands for. In his own writing Geach enforced rigorously a distinction between signs and things signified—a distinction that even the greatest logicians have not always strictly observed. Predicates belong to a broader class of expressions which Geach calls 'predicables'. A predicable may be attached not only to names, but also to pronouns, as in 'the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo'. An expression is a predicable when it can be attached to a subject, a predicate only when it actually is so attached in a proposition.

Propositions must be distinguished from assertions. In predicating we are not necessarily making a statement: a predicate may be attached to a subject in a subordinate clause. 'It took the genius of the young Frege', Geach wrote, 'to dissolve the monstrous and unholy union that previous logicians had made between the import of a predicate and the assertoric force of a sentence' (*Reference and Generality*, Ithaca, NY, 1968, p. 51). Henceforth, whenever he had to draw attention to this distinction, he would call it 'The Frege point'.

Names and predicables differ from each other. A name has a complete sense, and can stand by itself in a simple act of naming, such as 'Hullo, Jemima'. A predicable is what is left of a proposition when its subject is removed (e.g. '. . . is a cat') and so it does not have a complete sense, containing as it does an empty place to be filled by a subject. Because of this difference, Geach rejected the Aristotelian logic of terms—terms being items capable of being a subject in one proposition and a predicate in another. Aristotle, he used to say, was logic's Adam, and the doctrine of terms was his Fall.

Geach defended two theses which put him at odds with the majority of logicians. First, he claimed that there was no such thing as absolute identity. It made no sense to judge whether things are 'the same', or a thing remains 'the same', unless we add or understand some general term. A and B may be the same F, but not the same G. Second, he maintained that not only proper names but also common nouns could occur as the subjects of sentences. We may tell a story about the same animal, sometimes using 'Jemima', and sometimes using 'the cat . .' How could we make out, Geach asked, that 'Jemima' has what it takes to be a logical subject, but 'cat' has not?

Geach's first book-length publications were translations of the writings of others: *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (with Max Black, Oxford, 1952) and *Descartes: Philosophical Writings* (London, 1954: the title page credits also Anscombe, but the work was principally Geach's). These appeared after the Geach family had moved to Oxford to live in a house in 27 St John St. Now it was Peter who had to commute, from Oxford to Birmingham, where over the years he ascended the academic ladder, becoming successively lecturer, senior lecturer, and in 1961 reader.

During the 1950s Geach began to be fascinated by medieval philosophers other than Aquinas. Uniquely among British philosophers of the time, he acquired a detailed knowledge of the logical writings of such men as Walter Burleigh, William of Sherwood and John Buridan. This knowledge was put to use when he was asked to lecture in Oxford in 1957 as deputy for the University Reader in Medieval Philosophy. The lectures he gave in the aula of Blackfriars were the basis of an eventual substantial treatise, *Reference and Generality: an Examination of Some Medieval and Modern Theories.* This was first published by Cornell University Press in 1962, but was later frequently polished and appeared in a third edition in 1980.

After Wittgenstein's death in 1951 his *Philosophical Investigations* was posthumously published, with a translation by Anscombe (Oxford, 1953). In 1957 Geach published a short treatise on philosophy of mind, *Mental Acts* (London), which was to be and to remain one of the clearest expositions of Wittgenstein's thought. The celebrated argument against private language, Geach argued, did not deny the existence of private thoughts and feelings. Drawing on a favourite distinction of Frege's, he explained that words could have a private reference, but not a private sense. Elsewhere in the book he discussed the nature and formation of concepts, and set out a theory of judgement. He mounted a sustained attack on two targets: behav-

iourism, on the one hand, and on the other hand 'abstractionism', by which he meant the empiricist account of concept-formation. In his exposition he drew on both Wittgenstein and Aquinas, taking pains to show that Wittgenstein was no behaviourist and that Aquinas was no abstractionist.

Geach's next publications to appear in book form were articles on Aquinas and Frege. The essays had been commissioned for an encyclopaedia of philosophy, but were rejected by the editor, along with an essay on Aristotle by Anscombe. The rejects were published in 1961 by Blackwell and Cornell University Press under the title *Three Philosophers*. Geach's essay on Aquinas, along with a 1955 *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* paper 'Form and existence', entitle him to be regarded as the founder of a school of thought nowadays often referred to (somewhat misleadingly) as 'analytical Thomism'.

The essay on Aquinas starts with consideration of the key notions of matter, form, *esse* and operation. Aquinas' *materia prima* is stuff which is not actually anything all the time; it is not, as some have thought, some incomprehensible entity which is not ever anything at all. It is possible that Aquinas' concept may have lost all value as a fundamental analysis, in view of the progress of physics; but it still has application at a macroscopic level. Difference of matter is what makes the difference between two simultaneously existing individuals of the same kind, e.g. two pennies. However, identity over a period does not depend on identity of matter; one same living being may change its matter throughout by metabolism.

Form is the concrete substance minus its matter. In his *Aristotelian Society* paper of 1955 Geach had developed a valuable comparison between Frege's theory of functions and Aquinas' theory of forms. Just as Frege regarded a predicate such as '. . . is a horse' as standing for a particular kind of function, namely a concept, so Aquinas held that a general term such as 'horse' standing in predicate position referred to a form. The form which is referred to by the predicate which occurs in the sentence 'Socrates is wise' may be referred to also by the phrase 'the wisdom of Socrates', but this latter expression must not be construed as 'wisdom, which belongs to Socrates' just as 'the square root of 4' does not mean 'the square root which belongs to 4'.

'The wisdom of Socrates' refers, in Geach's terminology, to an *individualised* form; the expression which indicates the generic form, the form strictly so called, is not 'wisdom' nor 'the wisdom of Socrates' but 'the wisdom of . . .' 'Wisdom' *tout court* refers to nothing in heaven or earth; wisdom is always wisdom *of*: as Aquinas puts it, it is of something (*entis*) rather than itself something (*ens*). Against Plato's doctrine that the form

signified by a general term is 'one over against many', Aquinas insisted that the question 'one or many?' is itself only intelligible if we ask it in relation to a general term that signifies a form or nature.

In *Three Philosophers* Geach explains that in any given substance there is just one individualised form that makes a piece of matter an actual thing: this is the substantial form—in plants, animals, and humans the individual soul. The 'essence' or 'nature' of the cat Tibbles is something really distinct both from Tibbles and his soul; it includes matter, flesh, bone as well as Tibbles's soul, but not any particular bit of matter, flesh, and bone.

Geach attaches importance to Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality and to the concepts he examines within this framework. The section of the essay entitled 'Operations and tendencies' starts with a criticism of the Humean account of causality, and takes up Mill's idea that what actually happens is determined by the *tendencies* of the natural agencies involved in a given situation. This doctrine of tendencies, according to Geach, is very close to Aquinas' theory of *inclinations* or *appetites* in nature. Tendencies proceed from forms: some tendencies exist from forms existing in nature (e.g. the temperature of a body); others from forms existing only intentionally in thought. Desire is such a tendency, arising from the agent's apprehension, but directed towards something that would exist in nature and not only in the agent's apprehension. Sensitive appetite and will are distinguished by Aquinas according to the type of their objects—e.g. pleasant tastes vs riches and honour.

Aristotle himself applied the schema of actuality and potentiality at several levels—that of substance and accident, for instance, and that of matter and form. But he did not ever suggest that an individual's essence and its existence were related to each other as potentiality to actuality. There are passages in Aquinas, however, that suggest that this is so; and a theory of the relationship between essence and existence has been held up by twentieth century Thomists as a cardinal doctrine of Aquinas' metaphysics. In all creatures, it has been maintained, there is a real distinction between essence and existence; but in God there is no such distinction: God is his own essence and indeed is subsistent being (*esse*) itself.

If we take *esse* as equivalent to existence, it is difficult to make sense of this notion. There seems to be an absurdity in saying of anything that its essence is pure existence, an absurdity that is well brought out by Geach in a dialogue which he imagines between a theist and an atheist.

Theist: There is a God.

Atheist: So *you* say: but what sort of being is this God of yours?

Theist: Why I've just told you: There *is* a God, that's what God is.

However, according to Geach, *esse* is not fairly translated by 'existence', and in Aquinas' mature thought the *esse* of a being is something different from the fact of there being an X. *Esse* corresponds to the tensed sense of 'is' in which it is equivalent to 'now actually exists' and not to 'there is a . . .' A thing goes on existing because it goes on being the same X (e.g. man, horse, city); thus any persistent *esse* is the continued existence of some individual form.

The nature of goodness, or the meaning of 'good', was a central topic of analytic philosophy throughout the twentieth century. G. E. Moore at the beginning of the century claimed that goodness, the supreme moral value, was a non-natural quality, and that utilitarians, by identifying goodness with pleasure, committed a fallacy: the naturalistic fallacy of confusing a non-natural property with a natural one. Later, under the influence of logical positivism, some philosophers began to deny that goodness was any sort of property, natural or non-natural, and to claim that ethical utterances were not statements of fact at all, but simply expressions of emotion. R. M. Hare of Balliol maintained that to call something 'good' is to commend it: to call something a good X is to say that it is the kind of X that should be chosen by anyone who wants an X. There will be different criteria for the goodness of Xs and the goodness of Ys, but this does not amount to a difference in the meaning of the word 'good', which is exhausted by its commendatory function.

In a famous *Analysis* essay of 1956, 'Good and evil', Geach had used the Frege point to attack the descriptive/evaluative distinction in the case of the most general terms, such as 'good'. The important distinction, he claimed, is that between attributive and predicative terms. In the case of a predicative term, like 'red', one can know what it is for an X to be red without knowing what an X is. The case is not the same with attributive terms like 'large' or 'false'. 'Good' and 'bad', Geach says, are always attributive, not predicative. If we say of an individual A that he is good, *simpliciter*, we really mean that he is a good man, and if we call some behaviour good, we mean that it is a good human action. It is therefore folly to look for some property called goodness, or some activity called commending, which is always present when we call something good.

Now, in *Three Philosophers,* he argued that each of these analytic theories was a blind alley in explaining the relationship between goodness and the attribute that makes a thing good. Instead he offered a fourth thesis, drawn from Aquinas:

> Goodness as such is not identifiable with any special good-making characteristic; but for any given good thing there is a good-making characteristic whose possession by the thing is precisely what makes that thing good. (*Three Philosophers*, p. 82)

Later, in 'Assertion' (*The Philosophical Review*, 1965) Geach returned to the Frege point. The meaning of 'good' could not be explained in terms of commendation, because in many contexts we use it without any intention of commending. 'Good' can be predicated, for instance, in if-clauses. Someone who says 'if contraception is a good thing, then free distribution of condoms is a good thing' need not be commending either contraception or the free distribution of condoms.

In the same year William Kneale retired from the Oxford chair of moral philosophy. Among those who applied to succeed him were Elizabeth Anscombe and the New Zealander Arthur Prior, then Professor of Philosophy at Manchester, who shared Geach's interest in medieval logic. The successful candidate was Hare. Hare's promotion left a vacancy for a philosophy tutor in Balliol, and Geach, who had recently been elected a Fellow of the British Academy, considered applying for the post. He had become unhappy at Birmingham, where he detected a hostility to philosophy on the Arts Faulty Board. However, he gave up the idea once he learnt that Prior was a candidate, and he rejoiced when Prior was appointed to the fellowship in 1966.

In the following year Geach left Birmingham in protest at the University's decision to set up an Institute of Contemporary Culture. In his resignation letter he told the Dean that he had no wish to stay at a university that preferred Pop Art to Logic. Through the good offices of James Cameron he was appointed to a Professorship of Logic at Leeds. His inaugural lecture was entitled 'A History of the Corruptions of Logic' and began with a tribute to his father.

Sadly, Arthur Prior lived to hold his Balliol Fellowship only for three years: he died at Trondheim in Norway during his first sabbatical leave in 1969. At the request of his widow Mary, Geach and I collaborated with each other to edit and publish two posthumous volumes of his work: *Objects of Thought* (Oxford, 1971) and *The Doctrine of Propositions and Terms* (London, 1976).

In the year of Prior's death Geach published a volume of his own essays entitled *God and the Soul* (London, 1969). As an admirer of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, Geach could not accept either the Platonic idea of an immortal soul trapped in a body, or the Cartesian notion of an ego that was essentially purely mental. In the first three essays he argues

against these positions. Materialists hold that we think with the brain, immaterialists that we think with some non bodily part. Both are wrong: there is no such thing as an organ of thought. On the other hand, any disembodied spirit would not be a surviving human being: Aquinas' commentary on Corinthians is quoted to the effect that 'my soul is not I'. Reincarnation makes no sense, and the only hope of surviving death is the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

An essay entitled 'What actually exists' (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1968) supplements the 1955 Aristotelian paper on 'Form and existence', offering some criticism and modification of the views of Aquinas there expressed. Following Frege, Geach distinguishes between existence, as expressed by the quantifier, and actuality, which involves action or change. Numbers possess existence, but not actuality. Numbers can change, in the sense that five may cease to be the number of someone's children. But that is no real change—it is only what Geach nicknamed 'Cambridge change' because it figures in the writings of Russell and McTaggart. There is a Cambridge change in x if we have 'F(x) at time t" true, and 'F(x) at time $t1$' false, for some appropriate interpretation of the variables.

Theological essays in *God and the Soul* deal with causality and creation, the possibility of petitionary prayer, and the relationship of morality to divine commandments. 'On worshipping the right God' argues that if someone's thoughts about God are sufficiently confused he will fail to be thinking at all about the true and living God. It contains a forthright denunciation of various kinds of idolatry, past and present, but also presents general considerations about the difference between genuinely referring to a person by an erroneous description, and failing to refer at all because of a description that is too far off the mark.

Geach's preferred philosophical vehicle was the short essay: even his *magnum opus*, *Reference and Generality*, consists in part of reprints of earlier separate pieces. He could cram into a few thousand words as much philosophical meat as the average philosopher takes a whole book to package. His second collection of reprinted essays, *Logic Matters*, was published by Blackwell in 1972.

By now Geach was happily settled in to the Philosophy Department at Leeds, and seems to have been welcomed by his colleagues after an initial period of consternation at his appointment. When Roy Holland succeeded James Cameron as the other Philosophy Professor, he and Geach did not always see eye to eye: from time to time at departmental meetings, a member of the department reported, Geach would explode and Holland

would implode. But he now had colleagues who appreciated the value of logic and the philosophy of logic, and on the importance of Frege and Wittgenstein. With three of his colleagues he brought out *A Wittgenstein Workbook* (Oxford,1970). It is full of knotty problems for the reader to solve: the undergraduates for whom it was designed must have found it a tough challenge. Gradually Geach took over from junior colleagues the teaching of elementary logic: his course was later published as *Reason and Argument* (Oxford, 1976). He was also a staff member and librarian of a junior Hall of Residence, Lyddon Hall.

The University of Cambridge offered an invitation to give the Stanton lectures on philosophy of religion for the three years beginning in 1971. Geach took the invitation very seriously. He wrote later (reproduced in H. A. Lewis (ed.): *Peter Geach, Philosophical Encounters*, Dordrecht, 1991, p. 213:

> Very soon after my conversion to the Catholic Faith I took an important decision of principle: I would not of my own initiative write about religious matters, but would take an invitation to speak or write on such topics as a command from my Master. I feared that at best my work would be marred by my own vanity and combativeness; but I hoped that if I waited for orders before writing in the defence of the Faith, He who had laid the task upon me would give me grace towards its fulfilment. The invitation to give the Stanton Lectures in Cambridge came quite unsought; onerous as the task appeared in prospect, I dared not decline it.

It is not clear how this statement is to be reconciled with the fact that already in1969 *God and the Soul* had appeared. Perhaps Geach felt that it was in the Stanton lectures that he first crossed the boundary between natural and revealed religion.

The first set of lectures was published under the title *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge, 1977). After an introductory bow to McTaggart, Geach began the series with an attack on the notion of omnipotence, offering a list of things that God cannot do. God is not omnipotent but rather he is almighty, that is to say he has power over all things. God is omniscient: God knows that *p* if and only if *p* is true. What does this imply about God's knowledge of the future? Geach denies that the future exists in the way that the past exists: the future is no more than certain trends and tendencies in the present that have not yet been fulfilled. There is no future there for God to see: he knows the future not by seeing it but by controlling it. How then can God—as Scripture tells us—foreknow and foretell individual human sins? Geach admits that this is an intractable problem.

The remaining lectures in *Providence and Evil* treat of particular evils that present us with a problem in attributing goodness to God. The first to be discussed is animal pain. The living world appears to be the work of a mind of power and wisdom, but also of a mind indifferent to animal suffering. But sympathy with animals, Geach argues, would not be a virtue in God: it is a virtue in humans only because we share an animal nature. Going on to discuss the doctrine of original sin, Geach draws on Schopenhauer's teaching about the radical misdirection of the human will. The world is full of wickedness, renewed in each generation, and only a person who swims deliberately against the stream of the world can hope to be saved. Rejecting the idea that all men are equal in the sight of God, and that all have an equal chance of salvation and beatitude, Geach insists that it is absurd to rail against God for making men unequal. In his final lecture he offers an unflinching presentation of the traditional doctrine of Hell as an unending series of miseries, while insisting that these are the natural, not the arbitrarily inflicted, penalty of sin.

The second series of Stanton lectures, *The Virtues* (Cambridge, 1977), was less sombre than the first. A lecture was devoted to each of the four cardinal virtues in the list traditional since Plato, namely Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Courage. These were preceded by a lecture on why men need the virtues (a theme later developed to great effect by Philippa Foot) and three lectures devoted to the 'theological' virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. Rather than describe the series in sequence, I will pick out a few striking themes.

Geach argues that the origin of each new human life requires special Divine intervention. We can see this, he says, because the intentional modes of description needed for human activities are logically not derivable from natural science. He then continues:

> I cannot here develop the logical difference I have alluded to; Quine has anyhow done the work for me in *Word and Object* and other writings. He insists that there is no logical bridge from the propositions of natural science to the language involving indirect speech constructions that we naturally use to describe our own and our fellows' attitudes and meanings.

The lectures contain a number of surprises. For instance, unlike most contemporary Catholics, Geach did not believe that individual human life began with conception. A fertilised ovum, he says, is not a human being: it is only at a certain stage of development, prior to the appearance of a central nervous system, that the embryo produces a new human being, a rational animal. Other surprises are that unselfishness is denied to be a virtue, and that human inconsistency is held to be a precious gift of God.

In the lecture on temperance the 1973 Stanton lecturer appears rather less of a rigorist than his 1972 predecessor. Drunkenness, we are told, is not necessarily vicious, even though it reduces our alertness:

> While I cannot answer for the efficacy as a cure for colds or influenza of hot toddy self-administered in bed till you pass out unconscious, if the medical theory is right the moral objection to drunkenness vanishes; a man safe tucked up in bed has no duty for even the lowest degree of alertness, for he could lawfully just go to sleep.

Similar reasoning, Geach argued, could be applied to the use of cannabis.

By now Geach had acquired a formidable international reputation and was in demand as a visiting professor. He was a regular visitor to the University of Pennsylvania. In 1973 he repeated the first series of Stanton lectures at a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute in Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and in 1975 he repeated the second series at the University of Uppsala. He took particular pleasure in visits to Polish universities, where he lectured in the language of his infancy, and made friends with Tadeusz Kotarbinski and Bogus Wolniewicz. These visits began in 1963 and continued until 1985 when he held a visiting professorship in Warsaw.

In 1968 the Cambridge chair in philosophy once held by Wittgenstein and von Wright fell vacant with the retirement of John Wisdom. Gilbert Ryle, who was one of the electors, believed that Geach should be offered the post. Isaiah Berlin, who wanted Stuart Hampshire to be elected, wrote in consternation to Bernard Williams, who held the other Cambridge chair, 'I do not myself believe in Geach's great intellectual gifts—only in a ferocious, narrow, path, which many schoolmen must have had whose memories have very rightly perished.' In the upshot the electors chose Elizabeth Anscombe, and the Geach family moved to Cambridge when she took up the chair in 1970.

By the time of the move, the Geaches had produced and brought up seven children. Many legends circulate about the unconventional style of the family life at 27 St John Street Some of them are very likely true. Here I will repeat the only story that I had from Peter himself on this topic. Some neighbour had reported them to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children for cruelty to their children. When the inspector arrived, it was explained to him that one of the boys had indeed been beaten for breaking some precious object. According to Peter, the inspector, having surveyed the damage to the treasure and the damage to the boy, decided that what had been inflicted was merited and proportionate.

The Geach children were brought up to have a strict regard to their religious duties: they must attend Mass every Sunday and believe everything taught officially by the Catholic Church. Once, in Chicago, when a priest at the most solemn moment of the Mass used words that Peter regarded as heretical, he led his entire family out of the church shouting in protest. But with regard to man-made laws such as that on cannabis, Geach took a relaxed view in the practice of parenting no less than in philosophical theory.

1979 saw the publication of *Truth, Love and Immortality: an Introduction to McTaggart's Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA). This was the fruit of decades of dedicated reflection on McTaggart, and contained material that originated in the pre-war year of study at Hawarden. It was intended partly as a counterblast to C. D. Broad's monumental, and now largely forgotten, *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1933–8).

Geach's last book, *Truth and Hope* (Notre Dame, IN, 2001) consisted of lectures which he had given at the International Academy of the Principality of Liechtenstein in 1998. The lectures largely repeated the content of the earlier Stanton lectures—but they contain some excellent passages. One concerns a theme to which Geach often returned: the huge gulf between humans and other, non-rational, animals. The most significant difference, of course, is to be found in the nature of human language; but Geach offers a list of others:

> The composition of music, and the invention of forms of dance and ceremonial. The building of houses and other structures, whereby man becomes able to live in varied and very mutable climates, and is not confined to a particular ecological niche. The mastery of fire and flames, as means of heating and lighting, which also serve for preparing foodstuffs and other materials for human needs. The playing according to rules of all manner of games, athletic and intellectual. The devising of methods and standards of measurement. The devising of tools and machines for all sorts of purposes under human handling: the forelimbs of beasts are specialised, e.g. for walking or clawing, man's hand alone is *organon organwn*, the tool adapted for making and using tools. The devising of instruments of observation that supplement human sense-organs. The devising of means of transport, by land and sea (and now in the air).

Honours came to Geach from many sources. In 1965 he became a Fellow of the British Academy. He was delighted when in 1979 Balliol made him an Honorary Fellow, and in the same year he was made a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1983 he received the Forschungspreis of the A. von Humboldt Stiftung, and in 2000 he was awarded the Aquinas Medal of the American

Catholic Philosophical Society. Perhaps the distinction that gave him most pleasure was the Papal medal *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* in 1999.

Peter Geach's Catholic faith was traditional and unshakeable. But he never allowed his adhesion to Christian doctrine to blunt his logician's keen sense of the difference between good and bad arguments. Four dense pages of his Stanton lecture on temperance are devoted to demolishing traditional proofs that contraception is sinful. He goes on to say 'in spite of the logical badness, to my mind, of the arguments I have just given in favour of the tradition, I accept the content of the tradition as sound'.

It has been made a matter of reproach to Geach that he was more certain of his conclusions than of his arguments. This is reminiscent of Russell's complaint that Aquinas was no true philosopher because he was looking for arguments for what he already believed. The complaint comes strangely from a man who once took hundreds of pages to prove that one and one make two. If valid, it would exclude much of the best work of the greatest philosophers. Geach's Catholicism did not compromise his status as a philosopher, any more than Aquinas' faith nullifies his claim to be one of the greatest philosophers of any age.

However, it is a paradoxical feature of Geach's thought that the modern philosophers he most admired were all atheists, or close approximations to atheists. If we leave aside Wittgenstein, whom he once described to me as 'clinging on to God by the thinnest of threads', we can list as members of his philosophical pantheon Hobbes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, McTaggart, Russell, Quine, and Prior. And during his dark days at Birmingham those who provided spiritual consolation were not his fellow Roman Catholics, but the Christadelphians whom he regarded as the contemporary heirs of Hobbes.

Geach had faults as a philosopher, of which he was well aware. One of them was combativeness: hostility to what he saw as error often took him beyond the bounds of civility. He often launched such attacks against anonymous targets. Perhaps he thought it was more charitable to say 'some fools in Oxford think that *p*' rather than 'Professor S foolishly thinks that *p'*—but in fact the opposite was the case. Such formulations made it impossible for the reader to check whether Professor S did in fact hold that *p,* and by association it involved others in the crime of believing that *p*.

Geach had a prodigious memory, but he would charge it with burdens it would not bear. He would quote from a text that he believed he knew by heart, without checking his reference. Accordingly, from time to time quotations appear garbled, even when the detail of the text is essential to

the course of the argument. Thus, in *God and the Soul* a crucial passage of Dr Johnson is misquoted in order to show that there is no idolatry in the Mass.

Neither Geach nor Anscombe suffered fools gladly. But in point of pugnacity each of them changed their character over their lifetimes. Shakespeare's Macbeth is initially timid and is spurred on by his resolute wife; by the end of the play she is limp and doleful, while he is ruthless. With the Geaches, the trajectory took the opposite course. In the 1960s Peter gave a lecture to which Geoffrey Warnock replied with elegant flippancy. He reacted with obvious rage and had to be soothed down by Elizabeth from the audience. Late in life, in particular after two accidents which affected her brain, Elizabeth became impossibly intransigent, and made life extremely difficult for academic colleagues and fellow trustees of the Wittgenstein estate. Peter, naturally, at first took his wife's part in these quarrels; but once he realised the situation he apologised handsomely to those affected, and in his last years his demeanour to the public was commonly benign.

In 2006, however, he began to lose his grip on reality. He was diagnosed as suffering from vascular dementia, which he exhibited in impulses to destroy books and papers. He continued to be an exciting interlocutor and an illuminating correspondent, but his flashes of genius were often occluded by clouds of confusion. As an illustration of this I may quote a passage from a correspondence we had about Plato in 2006. I had written that it was a great pity that the classics syllabus in Oxford focused attention on the flawed *Republic* rather than on the really great dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. We had also been discussing Bertrand Russell. In reply, Peter wrote to me:

> Towards Plato my attitude has long been ambivalent. Admiring him as a philosophical genius, I might say of him what he himself said of Leibniz. 'His writings about religion obstinately defend ignorance and superstition. The best things in him are the most abstract, and the worst those which most nearly concern human life'. Plato in defence of Greek idolatry is a sad or tragic-comic spectacle. In the Laws he imports an Inquisition that shall subject to lifelong prison people who argue like Xenophanes and Parmenides and Anaxagoras against the superstition of Plato's contemporaries.

Here he was clearly confusing Plato with Russell: and yet the paragraph contains interesting insights on both philosophers.

In the last years of his life he was housebound in Richmond Road in Cambridge, devotedly cared for by his children. He was a victim of type 2 diabetes and had poor circulation in his legs, which meant that he had

regularly to visit the foot clinic in Addenbrooke's, where he would delight the staff by reciting poems such as 'The Owl and the Pussycat'. He also believed that he was suffering from labyrinthitis, which he complained ruled out any visits to Balliol, since he could not mount the staircase into the hall.

In *Who's Who* he had listed as his recreations 'reading stories of detection, mystery and horror: collecting and annotating old bad logic texts'. In old age his favourite detective story writer was John Dickson Carr, some of whose stories he translated into Polish. He had a lifelong taste for the macabre, and as he got older he came to prefer ghost stories. Reading crime stories in bed, he told me, made him fearful of any noise that might mean burglars—but he knew for certain that there were no ghosts.

He also occupied his declining years with philosophical tasks—writing commentaries on works by Russell and Flew, revising his earlier works and drafting new ones on consistency and commitment. Sadly, after 2006, he devoted much time, and reams of paper, to the task of calculating the prime factors of the decimal expansion of pi. In these latter days his principal occupation was the writing of letters. Sometimes he would write more than once to the same person on the same day. His children, realising that much of what he wrote was nonsense, would often refrain from taking the letters to the post. But many of his friends must treasure files bulging with the correspondence of these late years.

Apart from occasional frenetic and destructive outbursts, Geach's old age was, by his own account, serene (he died on 21 December 2013). He at one time amused himself by writing autobiographical fragments in elegiac couplets. One, which he quoted in the memoir he wrote for his Festschrift at the age of sixty-nine, offers a fitting summary of his closing years.

> Sexaginta annos complevi hucusque novemque
> In Domino sperans, dum vocet ipse: Veni.

ANTHONY KENNY
Fellow of the Academy

Note Much of the information in this memoir comes from Geach's own reminiscences published in Harry A. Lewis (ed.), *Peter Geach, Philosophical Encounters* (Dordrecht, 1991). When not otherwise specified, quotations from Geach are taken from that source. Much of the rest of the material derives from my own recollection and correspondence. I am most grateful for very substantial help that I have received from More Geach and Christopher Coope.